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Ex-CIA agent critical of agency's activities

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Former Central Intelligence Agency officer John Stockwell admits he is cynical about his former employer.

His disillusionment comes from a conflict between what he believes the United States stands for and the activities of the CIA.

"The CIA is setting itself above the law. I swore an allegiance to the Republic," said Stockwell, referring to his decision to break an agreement between agents and the CIA not to reveal secret information.

Addressing the packed chapel at Washington and Lee University Thursday night, Stockwell said he became disenchanted because the CIA has lied to the American people and damaged the country's reputation abroad.

"You can do anything to anybody. Everything the CIA does in a country is illegal. Nothing we're doing makes any sense in terms of national security."

His is not the typical resume of a radical troubleshooter or whistle blower. After attending the University of Texas on a scholarship, he joined the Marines because "they were supposed to be the best." Stockwell, 46, said he was bred on the image of the U.S. saving the world for democracy.

When he was discharged, the CIA contacted him.

As a field case officer in the CIA, with a rating equivalent to colonel, he was station chief in Africa and Vietnam, commander of the Angola Task Force and advisor to the National Security Agency on Angola operations.

"It was fun. It was like movie stuff."

But the job had another side that he wrote about in his book, "In Search of Enemies." Stockwell has the dubious distinction of being the highest ranking CIA agent to publicly criticize the organization and ask for its dismantlement. Because of the revelations in his book, the CIA sued him and won the right to review anything he writes about the agency.

"My lecture is fairly cynical because I've been a part of it," he said.

Covert operations are only secret to the American public, not to the people being killed or their relatives and friends who know the CIA is responsible, he said.

"The CIA has been directly responsible for the deaths of one million people and two million more in the Vietnam War and then the starvation in Cambodia and the killing there."

More than a million people have been killed directly through CIA operations, Stockwell said.

"We are giving them, the Soviet Union, on a silver platter, the people."

His speech was bitter, full of examples, statistics and humor. He drew laughter as he said prostitutes were called "special access agents."

"There is clearly a discrepancy between what our government tells us about the other half (of the world) and the truth," he said.

The State Department's briefings to the press about Angola were all fabrications he helped write, Stockwell said.

When Congress asked if South Africans were being supplied with weapons to fight in Angola, violating a United Nations agreement, Congress was told no.

"We were lying to the Senate. That's a felony."

U.S. and South African planes would land at an airstrip before

dawn and the weapons would be loaded before anyone noticed, he said.

In Vietnam, Stockwell sent a memo to his superiors about a South Vietnamese police chief who would take a prisoner into a "safe house" provided by the CIA and torture the prisoner for a night's entertainment.

Stockwell said he was told if he couldn't stomach his job he could be replaced.

"It isn't just Gestapo Aryan egomaniacs, or Slavic KGB officers or 350-pound African insurgents that chop up people and do heinous things. No society is immune to this horror, of doing heinous things to people, including ourselves," he said.